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# THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

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BY EDGAR JOHNSON GOODSPEED

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## AN OUTLINE BIBLE-STUDY COURSE OF THE AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF SACRED LITERATURE

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### STUDY IV

#### JESUS' FULLER REVELATION OF HIMSELF TO HIS DISCIPLES (13:1—17:26)

*First day.*—§ 20. *Washing the disciples' feet: the lesson of humility and service:* John 13:1-20. Read John 13:1. The controversial tone which has marked the central part of the Gospel now gives way to a more intimate and confidential intercourse between Jesus and his disciples. Notice that John puts the Last Supper, not on the night of the Passover supper, but on the night before. The evangelist intends to correct the notion so clearly expressed in Mark 14:12, 16, 18, that Jesus' last meal with the disciples was the Passover supper. Certain touches in Mark, indeed (14:2; 15:42), seem to agree with this placing of the Last Supper, which, on the one hand, avoids making the Supper an outgrowth or modification of the Passover supper, and, on the other, brings the death of Jesus to the time at which the Passover lambs were being sacrificed throughout the city. Note that in 13:1 the contrast between the disciples and the world, so characteristic of this Gospel, reappears, as does the supernatural knowledge of Jesus. The verse not only gives a very touching picture of the unselfish affection of Jesus for his disciples, so that his whole thought in this last night of his life was for them, but it suggests the evangelist's interpretation of his death as endured primarily for "his own"; cf. 10:11; 15:13.

*Second day.*—Read John 13:2-4. Cf. Matt. 11:27; Philip. 2:6. Notice again the emphasis on Jesus' extraordinary knowledge, and observe that his consciousness of his divine nature is the background of the menial act he now prepares to perform.

*Third day.*—Read John 13:5-11. In countries where sandals were worn, which protect only the soles of the feet from the dust, it was the duty of an oriental host to offer the guests who came under his roof, water with which to wash their feet. It is singular that in John the washing follows the Supper; cf. Luke 7:44. The point of the story is of course the extraordinary condescension of Jesus in doing this menial service for his disciples. The process of interpretation which the memory of the disciples was later to apply to these events is suggested here, vs. 7, as above in 12:16. The symbolic character of Jesus' action is clearly brought out in vs. 8: the feet-washing symbolizes the attitude of humble service to others. Every follower of Jesus must experience it. Does vs. 10 refer to baptism? The thought is that he who has once entered upon the Christian life

has need only to renew each day his attitude of humility and service to his fellows. Notice the continued emphasis upon the extraordinary knowledge of Jesus, vs. 11.

*Fourth day.*—Read John 13:12-17. What lesson is drawn here from the incident of the feet-washing? How do you interpret vs. 14? Vs. 16: a similar saying of Jesus occurs in Matt. 10:24; what is its application here in John? Notice the characteristically Greek emphasis of knowledge as a condition of "doing," vs. 17; cf. 8:32.

*Fifth day.*—Read John 13:18-20. The supernatural knowledge of Jesus is again emphasized. He predicts his betrayal by one of his immediate followers, and declares that he does so that when they see his prediction fulfilled they may have their belief in him confirmed. Vs. 20 recalls a similar saying of Jesus recorded in Matt. 10:40. If they yield to his Spirit and go on his errands, they become his actual representatives, sharing his dignity and privilege.

*Sixth day.*—§ 21. *The prediction of the betrayal; the withdrawal of the betrayer:* John 13:21-30. Read John 13:21-23. The prediction of the betrayal now becomes more specific. The beloved disciple now first appears in the narrative. He is mentioned in this way twice in the Gospel (13:23; 19:26), and twice in the epilogue (21:7, 20). The Gospel nowhere gives his name, but the use of this title for him makes him much more conspicuous than any name could have done. Is he the apostle John, or an ideal figure, the typical sympathetic follower of insight and devotion, who would have understood Jesus as none of his actual followers seems to have done? Or does he unite these two characters?

*Seventh day.*—Read John 13:24-30. The persons at the Supper were reclining about the table on long couches, each probably accommodating three persons. Jesus would naturally occupy the place of honor at the head of the principal couch, and next him at his right reclines the beloved disciple, to whom even Peter is subordinated. Jesus designates Judas by handing him a morsel of bread which he has first dipped in the common bowl of sauce upon the table. In keeping with Jesus' mastery of every situation he here appears as telling Judas that the time has come for the betrayal; cf. 7:30; 8:20. Vs. 29 is further proof that the evangelist means that the Passover is still in the future; cf. 13:1.

*Eighth day.*—§ 22. *The farewell discourses of Jesus:* John 13:31-16:33. Read John 13:31-35. The departure of Judas leaves Jesus alone with his loyal followers, to whom he can speak fully and without reserve, and the great discourse and prayer which form the culmination of the Gospel follow (13:31 through chap. 17). Jesus speaks of his death, now close at hand, as his glorification; cf. 7:39; 12:16, 23. Love is now declared to be the bond of the spiritual fellowship (the church), represented by the little group of disciples gathered about the table. Compare with this I John 4:7-21. It is an exalted idea that the Christians are to be known not by any rite or outward mark but by the love they show to one another, and that the love of Jesus is to be the standard and pattern for theirs. Is this a broadening or a narrowing of Jesus' teaching in the earlier gospels? Cf. Matt. 5:43-48.

*Ninth day.*—Read John 13:36-38. Notice again the evangelist's characteristic emphasis upon Jesus' supernatural knowledge, vss. 36, 38. Peter does not understand Jesus as well as the beloved disciple does.

*Tenth day.*—Read John 14:1-4. Jesus now seeks in these beautiful words to comfort his disciples in view of his departure. He goes away to prepare for their later coming to the house of many abiding-places, but he will come again to them, that they may be with him. The Gospel now begins the skilful modification of the early idea of Jesus' visible return on the clouds of heaven into the coming of his spirit into the believer's heart.

*Eleventh day.*—Read John 14:5-7. Jesus has already declared himself to be life, in the sense that he introduces men to the higher divine life which is eternal, 11:25. The evangelist has described him as the source of truth, 1:17, and Jesus has promised the knowledge of the truth to those who abide in his word, 8:32. He now declares himself to be life and truth, at the same time describing himself as the way by which alone men can come to God. The common point of emphasis in these three ways of putting the religious significance of Jesus is that only through him can men attain salvation, whether it be conceived as the divine life, or as the apprehension of truth, or as finding God. Vs. 7: in what sense is it true that Jesus has definitely added to our knowledge of God? Is it in simple fact easier to find God and to know him than it was before Jesus lived and taught?

*Twelfth day.*—Read John 14:8-11. Notice that the discourse here has something of the form of a dialogue; Peter, Thomas, Philip, and Judas (not Iscariot) successively question Jesus (13:36; 14:5, 8, 22). "The answer to Philip at the supper may be regarded as the central theme of the whole Gospel. . . . Jesus himself is the revelation, and according as men know him, through a living fellowship, they attain to the knowledge of God" (Scott). With vs. 10 compare 7:16 and 8:29: Jesus' filial dependence upon God is brought out in these verses. Vs. 11: faith here is not, as in the earlier Gospels, the condition of Jesus' mighty works, but their result. Yet, as elsewhere in this Gospel, faith based on Jesus' works is inferior to faith inspired by association with him. Is faith in this Gospel more like intellectual assent to doctrine than like personal dependence upon God? That is, is it belief rather than trust?

*Thirteenth day.*—Read John 14:12-14. The departure of Jesus is to lead to his return as a spiritual presence in the hearts of his followers, and thus endowed they will carry on his work with even greater power. This suggests that the wonders of Jesus in this Gospel—feeding multitudes, making water wine, giving sight to the blind, raising the dead—may be regarded as symbolic of the later spiritual achievements of his followers. This new endowment of Jesus' presence will give the Christians' prayers the efficacy of Jesus' own, since he will in effect be speaking through them to his Father; cf. 11:42.

*Fourteenth day.*—Read John 14:15-21. To those who love and follow Jesus he will send another helper, the spirit of truth, who shall abide with them and reside in them. It might seem that this being, so objectively spoken of, must be someone other than Jesus himself, but this impression is immediately corrected by vs. 18: "I come unto you," and a little later in vs. 21: "I will reveal myself unto him." The promised helper is to be Jesus' own spiritual presence. This promise is made, not only to the disciples present at the Supper, but to anyone who afterward should know and follow Jesus' teaching; cf. 20:29b.

*Fifteenth day.*—Read John 14:22-24. The earlier apocalyptic idea of Jesus' return had represented it as a spectacular event manifest to all the world. But the teaching here presented is that the world will not behold the presence of the returning Jesus, vs. 17. Judas' question relates to this difference. Jesus again affirms that he and his Father will come and dwell as a permanent inward presence in those individual hearts that love him. Others are neither capable nor desirous of receiving him, vs. 24. Again, in this verse as in 7:16 and 14:10, Jesus declares his filial dependence upon his Father for his message. Luke is the only one of the earlier evangelists to mention this Judas among the apostles (Luke 6:16).

*Sixteenth day.*—Read John 14:25-31. It will be seen that the Gospel here identifies the coming of the Spirit with the return of Jesus to the world as a spiritual presence in the hearts of his followers, describing it variously as the sending of the helper or comforter, his own coming unto them, and even the coming of his Father and himself to stay with those who love him. This spiritual presence will revive and perpetuate Jesus' teaching, and in the expectation of its speedy coming the disciples are urged to tranquillity and peace. Vss. 28, 31 again emphasize the subordination of Jesus to his Father, and vs. 29, like 13:19 above, calls attention to his power of prediction incident to his supernatural knowledge.

*Seventeenth day.*—Read John 15:1-10. This allegory is the nearest approach to a parable which the teaching of Jesus in this Gospel contains. Certainly it is quite unlike the parables of the earlier Gospels, and it may more properly be called an allegory. It teaches the significance of Jesus as the source of life. Spiritual fruitfulness is dependent upon vital union with him, and life is viewed as a higher kind of existence which can be attained only through mystical union with Jesus, the giver of life.

*Eighteenth day.*—Read John 15:11-16. The relation of Jesus to his followers is here reinterpreted as that of friendship, for he has shared with them his knowledge of his Father's will. The Gospel's habitual emphasis upon knowledge reappears here. Jesus' death is now interpreted as endured, not as in Paul's letters to atone for men's sins, but for the sake of his friends, to whom it more fully reveals his love and whom it binds more closely to him. This recalls the figure of the good shepherd laying down his life for the sheep, 10:11; cf. 13:16.

*Nineteenth day.*—Read John 15:17-21. The opposition between the church and the world again appears. The ancient world, especially in the first and second centuries, altogether misunderstood the church and credited Christians with cannibalism and other monstrous practices. Before the end of the first century the empire had begun to persecute the church. The language of this paragraph is colored by these contemporary experiences of the church. How are they explained? Notice again the importance of knowledge, 15:21.

*Twentieth day.*—Read John 15:22-27. The revelation of Jesus, attested by his signs, has opened to men the higher divine life; in rejecting it they convict themselves of sin in a far deeper sense than would otherwise have been possible. In hating him they have in effect hated God who is revealed in him. The promised helper or comforter is now described, vs. 26, as proceeding from the Father and bearing witness to Jesus. Where has this idea of witness to Jesus appeared before in this Gospel?

*Twenty-first day.*—Read John 16:1-7. Notice in these verses the atmosphere of contemporary persecution, vs. 16, the emphasis upon knowledge, vs. 3, and upon Jesus' power of prediction, vs. 4; cf. 13:19; 14:29. Again, as in 14:12, 16, Jesus' departure must precede the coming of the helper, vs. 7. Jesus speaks now of sending the helper, now of coming himself.

*Twenty-second day.*—Read John 16:8-15. These verses set forth the influence of the Spirit which is to come, upon the world and upon Jesus' followers. To the world it will so vindicate Jesus' claims that the world will recognize its sin in rejecting him, together with his righteousness and the judgment which the world has through his presence in it passed upon itself. To Jesus' followers the helper will come as the spirit of truth, enlightening them so that they shall gain larger vision of truth and deeper insight into the mind and teaching of Jesus. This thought of the progressive development of the Christian consciousness is one of the great ideas of this Gospel. What is the basis of condemnation in the judgment as here stated, vs. 9? What is it in the picture of the judgment given in Matt. 25:45?

*Twenty-third day.*—Read John 16:16-24. This strangely repeated emphasis upon the "little while" that is to intervene between Jesus' death and his return to stay with his disciples is highly significant in John, for it means that Jesus' resurrection is virtually his final return to his disciples as the helper or spirit of truth to abide as a spiritual presence in their hearts. The resurrection, the coming of the Spirit, and the return of Christ are thus identified in John. Why will no one be able to take the disciples' joy from them, vs. 22? Why will they ask Jesus no further question in that coming day? Why will all their prayers in his name be answered, vs. 23, 24?

*Twenty-fourth day.*—Read John 16:25-28. In contrast with the figurative language in which these discourses are cast, the voice of Jesus' Spirit in the Christian consciousness is clear and distinct. With vs. 26 cf. 14:14; 15:7; 16:23. Again the great ideas of the love of God and the continued presence of Christ are emphasized.

*Twenty-fifth day.*—Read John 16:29-33. Where else in this Gospel has this thought of the supernatural knowledge of Jesus been expressed? Cf. 1:48; 2:25; 4:18, 39, etc. Vs. 32 expresses Jesus' consciousness of God as a sustaining presence. Notice again the thought of peace so finely characteristic of this Gospel; cf. 14:1, 27. Again, as often before, the little group of disciples representing the church is silhouetted against the dark background of a hostile world. But Jesus in his own life has won a moral victory over the world which guarantees his ultimate spiritual triumph over it.

*Twenty-sixth day.*—§ 23. *Jesus' prayer for his disciples:* John 17:1-26. Read John 17:1-5. This intercessory prayer marks the culmination of Jesus' work; he now declares it finished. The hour is come. The honoring or glorifying of the Son describes the approaching death of Jesus in one of its aspects. Cf. 13:31. Life is again described in vs. 3 in terms of knowledge. How is this knowledge defined? The earlier apocalyptic conception had been that Jesus would return on the clouds to do his proper messianic work. What bearing does vs. 5 have upon this?

*Twenty-seventh day.*—Read John 17:6–11. The contrast with the world is again sharply drawn, vs. 9. With vs. 10 compare 16:15. Does vs. 11 suggest that the church is in some sense to take the place of Jesus in the world? Does this imply an exalted idea of its dignity and mission? Yet the disciples' great heritage from Jesus was not an institution, but an inward spirit of peace and love; cf. 14:27. Notice the emphasis upon the unity of the church; cf. 10:16; 11:52. This is of course primarily a spiritual unity. Does it also imply anything as to the developing organization of the church in the writer's day, e.g., the system of presbyters (or bishops) and deacons that had replaced the primitive want of organization? cf. I Cor. 12:28.

*Twenty-eighth day.*—Read John 17:12–19. The followers of Jesus, like him, enjoy a higher life; they are not of this world, vs. 16. Jesus consecrates himself or devotes himself to death that his followers may be the more fully consecrated to God, vs. 19. Does vs. 16 apply to the disciples as the first of those who are to guide the church and after them to those who become its later leaders? Cf. 15:27; 20:21.

*Twenty-ninth day.*—Read John 17:20–24. These words foreshadow the wider Christian circle of the writer's day, united into one through Jesus' devotion of himself in his death, vss. 20, 21; cf. 10:16; 11:52. Here, as in 10:15, 16, the unifying of all that believe is connected with Jesus' death; cf. vs. 19, above, and 12:32, 33. The thought that Jesus' followers are to be with him recalls the beautiful expression of the Christian hope in 14:3. Jesus' death appears in John as his release from the limitations of time and place which the incarnation had imposed upon him, so that instead of being with one little group of disciples only, Jesus by virtue of his divine nature can after his death be present in the heart of each of his followers on earth and also be with those who have passed on into the house of many abodes. That is, this Gospel connects the whole influence of the Spirit of God in the human heart with the personality of Jesus.

*Thirtieth day.*—Read John 17:25–26. In these verses notice the emphasis upon knowledge and love. Jesus alone knew God and revealed him. As a divine presence he will still communicate this revelation to his followers and thus awaken the divine love in their hearts. Cf. I John 4:19.

What are the leading ideas of this farewell discourse, chaps. 14–16? How does it compare with the Sermon on the Mount? Cf. Matt. chaps. 5, 6, 7. Is it as varied, ethical, and practical? Is it more meditative, mystical, and theological? What are the leading thoughts in the intercessory prayer, chap. 17? How does it compare with the Lord's Prayer, Matt. 6:9–13?